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ABSTRACT

This document contains six papers examining the theoretical and practical development of university adult continuing education (ACE) curricula in the late 1990s. The following are among the factors considered in "An Exploration of the Factors Affecting the Adult Continuing Education Curriculum" (Roseanne Benn): goals; cultural, political, and educational forces; and experiences or philosophies of knowledge. "Word-Power: The Influence of Language on Practice in Curriculum Development" (Simon Trezise) explores the power of the dominant discourse and the power of individuals to resist or change it. The drive toward vocational relevance in ACE in the last 2 decades and its effect on curriculum development is analyzed in "A Re-formation of Liberal Values: Embedding Transferable Skills in the Adult Continuing Education Curriculum" (Roger Fieldhouse). The trend toward a "skills-based" history in ACE is traced in "Developing a History Curriculum for Adult Learners--A Case Study" (Lynne Thompson). "A Part-time Humanities Degree off Campus: Factors in Curriculum Design" (Ella Westland) describes efforts at the University of Exeter's outpost in Cornwall to respond to changing student demands and funding formulas. "Widening Access: A Curriculum for Distance Learning" (Caroline Whiting) outlines the process of setting up distance learning provision in ACE at Exeter. (MN)

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UNIVERSITY of EXETER

Centre For Research in Continuing Education

Occasional Paper Number 3

A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE

Edited by
Roseanne Benn
and
Roger Fieldhouse

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INTRODUCTION

This collection of papers is intended to be a contribution towards the theoretical and practical development of an adult continuing education curriculum in the particular situation facing university adult continuing education in the late 1990s. The collection does not lay claim to any finality in such development: indeed the papers raise as many questions as they offer solutions. Therefore they should be read as a contribution to an ongoing debate rather than a conclusion. The first three papers (Benn, Trezise and Fieldhouse) concentrate largely on some of the more theoretical and contextual issues relating to the development of an adult continuing education curriculum while the remaining three (Thompson, Westland and Whiting) offer more specific, practical examples of curriculum development.

Benn reminds us that there are many external forces influencing the development and determining the form and content of the curriculum while Trezise shows how important language is not only in shaping the curriculum but also in demonstrating (or disguising) its ideological nature and purpose. He suggests that skills learnt by mature students 'in one area may not be interchangeable or transferable to another specialism' which leads him to question what he sees as the macho masculinity of the long march to modularity. This would appear to be at odds with Fieldhouse's more optimistic vision of a re-emergence of liberal values in transferable skills, but in fact both are advocating what Trezise calls 'the maze of learning' which allows (and helps) students to find their own way to their own learning goals. The curriculum should facilitate - not hinder - this journey.

Thompson explores the development of a history curriculum and illustrates the transferable skills (also referred to by Fieldhouse in his paper) which can be incorporated into such a curriculum. Westland describes the evolution of a part-time humanities degree curriculum for Cornwall and suggests that it should not attempt to replicate the full-time campus experience. In certain respects this will always be impossible in an off-campus course. But in any case Westland argues that adult continuing education has some excellent substitute characteristics which the curriculum should exploit to the full.

Finally, Whiting outlines some of the practical issues and problems in setting up distance learning provision, and how they have been tackled in an HEFCE-funded project; together with some of the wider questions which need to be addressed in a distance learning curriculum.

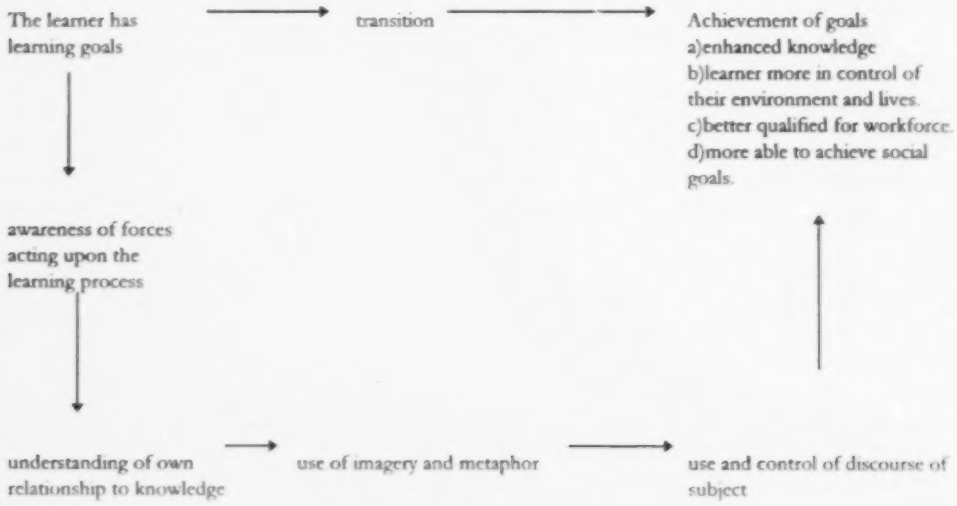
An exploration of the factors affecting the adult continuing education curriculum

Roseanne Benn

It can be argued that the aim of education is not only to enable learners to satisfy vocational and personal goals but also to facilitate and encourage learners to participate fully as citizens. In a democratic society, this implies curricula that serve everyone in that society, with aims and objectives located in human and social good and which are not just consumer-driven, corporate or reproductive. By this criterion, it can be argued that education at all levels alienates and fails a large proportion of the population. Nevertheless it is possible to start to change this situation by locating education for adults in a philosophical, political, historical and social framework with a curriculum and pedagogy informed by this conceptualisation.

The learning pathway

The prime purpose of the adult classroom must be to allow the learner to achieve their stated objectives and hence the educational process should be the transition from the learner's present knowledge to the achievement of the learner's goals, whatever these might be. However the process may well be ineffective unless and until the learner becomes both consciously aware of the external forces acting on their own learning and able locate themselves and their experiences in the wider framework that encompasses philosophical, historical, cultural, political and educational factors. The steps necessary to achieve the required transition might be as shown below.



Hence to move from goals to the achievement of those goals may not be a simple direct transition but may require intermediary steps as outlined. This is not to argue that raised awareness of these forces by providers or learners would be sufficient to produce transformations of social reality. The critical reflective approach may be rejected by the learner, be accepted in the context of the classroom but not transferred elsewhere in the learner's life, or result in frustration and anger on the student's part over an increased awareness of forces and circumstances which the individual cannot change. An emancipatory intent is no guarantee of an emancipatory outcome. This is not to argue against this more emancipatory form of education: far from it, but educators need to be aware of these potential outcomes. A realistic assessment of the outcomes of any change of teaching is that individuals might be more frustrated in their new state of consciousness but they may also be more empowered to join attempts to change to a more just society. The net result in our consensual society will not be revolution but might lead to a slight shift in the political climate towards a more democratic and participatory society.

A matrix of factors

The first step in the process is the identification of the forces acting upon the learning process. These powerful forces operating on the three main actors in the learning and teaching process - the learner, the tutor and the curriculum - can be represented by the matrix at the end of this paper.

All elements in the matrix are vectors ie, variable with both direction and magnitude. Each is acting on the learner, tutor or curriculum with a push or pull factor of varying strength towards either an emancipatory, empowering education or a banking, reproductive one. No variable is intrinsically more important than any other: each has an impact. The strength and direction will vary over individuals, institutions and societies and over time.

The rest of this paper will be concerned with locating the curriculum within this framework.

The goals of the curriculum

The goals or aims of a particular curriculum for adult education courses will usually be spelt out in publicity and submissions to validating agencies. But behind these explicit statements is an agenda which reflects the role education plays in our society. Education plays at least a treble role in our society. It governs the production and distribution of knowledge in society; acts as an agent of socialisation of the individual into the totality of relationships in society; and is a force for emancipation and growth, both individual and collective (Field 1992). Each role is inter-related with the others, but also acts to some extent in conflict with them. In their essentials, all three roles are present in our education system so curricula are designed to fulfil these aims. What varies from curriculum to curriculum are the relative proportions.

The curriculum and political forces

In the present day, the first two of the three roles education given above have become predominant. The effect of political forces on the curriculum is considerable and has resulted in recent years in a utilitarian, assessment-driven curriculum based on objectives and competencies. The predominant voice in education has until recently been that of the New Right which has strongly influenced the design of the National Curriculum and encouraged the development of National Vocational Qualifications and other competency-based qualifications. The political view of education that it is for socialising and training has held sway for many years now though there are signs of change with the new government..

The curriculum and cultural forces

Our society is characterised by cultural diversity. In order to reflect and incorporate all the different cultures, the curriculum needs take account of the different cognitive styles of students and refer to variations in knowledge systems throughout the ages and in different cultures today (Nickson 1992). Cultural diversity can be accommodated by utilising adults' background education, their experiential knowledge whether gained through work, leisure or domestic activities and their experiences of learning as members of different cultures. It is useful in this context to widen the definition of culture to include, for example, gender, class, age, minority ethnic group. One approach is through discussion, and hence understanding, of the seemingly self-evident logical truths which form the basic operations of thought and through an exploration of the forces operating upon students and their environment which lead to unquestioned assumptions and attitudes.

Our society is also characterised by structural inequality. To help counteract this, each adult education curriculum needs to seriously engage in equal opportunities through development of policies and procedures and active combating of sexism, racism and classism in the syllabus, pedagogy, text books, materials or assessment. The ethos of the tutor and institution needs to ensure that, wherever they occur, stereotyping incidents should be discussed openly and time given to such discussion seen as important. Criticism of discrimination in materials or, more contentiously, pedagogy can increase awareness of stereotyping and hence help to overcome it (Burton 1989). Changes do not happen quickly but are culminative.

Ironically, it is the basically liberal and tolerant nature of British culture that sometimes gets in the way, in that we are reluctant to probe or examine learner's cultural assumptions for fear that this will be construed as criticism. The curriculum needs to recognise cultural differences because only then can it incorporate them by commission. If we distinguish, we can begin to eliminate discrimination. If we first recognise difference, then we can learn not to discriminate by omission.

The curriculum and alternative educational paradigms

The dominant approach of adult educators to adult education and education for adults over recent years reflects at least part of the third role of education in our society as given above: education as a force of emancipation and growth, individual and collective. It has been located in a belief in individual growth, reflected in the student-centred, group-orientated, problem-solving, progressive educator approach which views human beings and their growth and development as central. Though initially appealing, the problem with this perspective is that it is very individualistic and does not locate the individual in a political, social and economic matrix nor does it recognise the effect of this matrix on society and the education that society provides.

Interpretations of knowledge are contingent upon how and where the promoters are positioned in society. The extent to which one definition of knowledge is recognised or how far other definitions are resisted depends on the interplay of dominant power structures. The discourse of the academy represents the authorised truth and knowledge. The power base of academic knowledge is defended through a cultural capital of values which over time have become entrenched as the 'common sense' against which all eternal values are judged (Preece 1996). Educational discourses, forms and practices have played a significant and powerful role in the maintenance and legitimisation of objective knowledge and scientific rationality. A consequence has been the suppression of 'other' and the acceptance of a white Western male middle class norm.

There is a need for a reconfiguration of adult learning opportunities through increased difference and space for a diversity of voices. The decline of the meta-narrative of academe and the greater significance

of localised knowledge requires the skill of working with difference with a diversity of learners which enable tutors to be explorers rather than preservers of tradition (Edwards and Usher 1995).

The forces of postmodernism with their redefinitions of knowledge may contribute to the reconceptualisation of knowledge moving from a modernistic absolutist to a postmodern constructivist paradigm. Constructivism is a theoretical stance about knowledge, its creation and relationship to the world. It sees knowledge as actively constructed by the learner, not passively received from the environment. 'Coming to know' is an adaptive process that organises one's experiential world, rather than discovers an independent pre-existing world outside the mind of the knower.

Ascher (1991) uses the concept of the circle and line to exemplify this. She notes the importance in Western cultures of the straight line, flat surface and right angle, arguing that to adults from these cultures these forms are necessary, sensible and proper. For Native Americans, on the other hand, the circle is the fundamental shape and the square is against nature. Each culture sees their geometric form as 'natural' and right. This example suggests that geometric ideas are an integral part of a culture's world view and are hence social and cultural constructs. This can be extrapolated to other forms of knowledge.

In the same way as cultures construct knowledge, so individuals are not 'given' ideas and knowledge but construct it themselves. Learning or 'coming to know' is the process of adapting one's view of the world as a result of this construction. If learning is seen as the continuous act of making sense and fitting into experience rather than the absorption of preordained knowledge, then teaching is the provision of opportunity to make sense and encounter constraints and anomalies rather than to convey knowledge.
This has a major impact on the curriculum (Jaworski 1988). At a stroke, it exposes the existing cannonisation, exclusion and rarefication of the formal curriculum and demands an alternative.

There are other ways of examining the paradigms within which the curriculum operates. Four different perspectives of the curriculum can be identified which have a fundamental effect on the educational outcome (Willis 1995). The first perspective is **remedial** where what is to be learnt, how it is to be taught and how it is assessed are all seen as given. Here the educational task is seen as providing adults with missing skills, experiences, knowledge attitudes or motivations. The second perspective is **non-discriminatory** where what is to be learnt is given but how it is to be taught and assessed is not. The task here is to draw upon and extend the learner's experiences and provide a supportive learning environment with more valid assessment opportunities. The third perspective is **inclusive** where each curriculum is just one of a selection from a wide variety of curricula and therefore neither given nor unchangeable. Here the aim is to provide the learner with curricula which better acknowledge, accommodate, value and reflect their own and their social group's experiences, interests and needs. And lastly, a **socially critical perspective** where the curriculum is actively implicated in the production and reproduction of social inequality, being one of the means by which dominant cultural values and groups interests are maintained. Here the aim is to help individuals to develop a different view of knowledge, understand how they are positioned by knowledge and how to use it in the interests of social justice.

The effect of the tutor on the curriculum

Often one of the main purposes of state-provided education is for socialisation and the reproduction of the *status quo*. The implementation of this purpose will lie primarily with the design of the curriculum but the role of the tutor is crucial. From one perspective, the education of adults can be portrayed as an activity taking place within the context of a particular culture within which the practitioners unconsciously transmit the accumulated 'cultural capital' implicit within the curriculum with little reflection, recourse to philosophy or even an overview of the holistic impact of their activities. Adult education practitioners in this view would thus share a culture - one in which they once were the 'empty vessels'- and now filled to the brim, teach it. Adult educators, in sharing this culture, also share meanings. They are tied into a circle of reproduction which not only reproduces the dominant cultural ideas but also

reproduces the shared meanings and understanding of the group. They unconsciously abide by the dominant attitudes and values found within their 'social group' and, through interaction with this group, the *status quo* is not only maintained but reinforced. Hence the educational system is a reflection of the dominant culture, holding the values of this culture as important and transmittable.

However, the adult educator is not a passive 'instrument' and will approach the curriculum from their own 'standpoint' including from their own cultural position, with their own philosophy of knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learning. In some situations, the tutor will have considerable autonomy and control over the curriculum. This may result in the tutor subverting the stated or unstated aims and objectives of the curriculum to their own ends either as a conscious or unconscious process. Curricula can bind the tutor closely through assessment regimes but nevertheless particularly in the adult classroom, very little is known of what actually occurs behind the closed door which gives the tutor considerable power.

The effect of the learner on the curriculum

Whether in fact the learner has any effect at all on the curriculum will depend on the aims and beliefs of both the tutor and the curriculum. If both are governed by an absolutist approach to knowledge and an authoritarian view of teaching, then the learner will be seen as a passive receiver of knowledge transfer and have little impact *per se*. If however knowledge is seen as absolute and unchangeable but the pedagogy as student-centred and humanist, then the content will not be affected by the student body but the approach to teaching will. When knowledge is seen as constructivist and teaching as humanist, then the learner must be central to both knowledge formation and the pedagogic approach.

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This is an adaptation of a chapter from R. Benn (1997) *Adults count too: mathematics for empowerment*, *Leicester: NIACE.*

Factors acting on the learner, tutor and curriculum include:

	Learner	Tutor	Curriculum
Goals	personal development; utilitarian; social purpose.	professional satisfaction; learner's goals; reconstruction of part of tutor's knowledge.	to enable learning, satisfy value system.
Cultural forces	attitudes to gender, class, race, age, etc: current world view; horizons of time and place.	attitudes to gender, class, race, age, etc.; current world view; horizons of time and place.	attitudes to gender, class, race, age, etc; current world view; horizons of time and place.
Political forces	political expectations; climate of lifelong learning; qualification 'mania'.	political imperatives of government, quangos funding bodies and institutions.	political imperatives of government,quangos funding bodies and institutions.
Educational forces	experiences of school and life.	experiences of school, education and life; dominant educational theories; nstitutional educational beliefs.	dominant educational theories.
Experiences or philosophies of knowledge	experiences of formal knowledge	personal philosophy of knowledge.	philosophies of knowledge.
Learner	reflective learner.	strong motivation of adult learners.	articulation between learner's goals and curriculum.
Tutor	pedagogical approach.	reflective practitioner.	articulation of tutor's pedagogy and philosophy with that of the curriculum.
Curriculum	match of curriculum to learner's goals.	articulation of tutor's pedagogy and philosophy with that of the curriculum.	—

Word-power: The influence of language on practice in curriculum development

Simon Trezise

'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in a rather a scornful tone, 'It means just what I want it to mean -neither more nor less'.
'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean different things.'
'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master -that's all'
(Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass).

In appearance, speech may well be of little account, but the prohibitions surrounding it soon reveal its links with desire and power
(M. Foucault, 'The Discourse on Language').

at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between differing socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles...
(M. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination).

Word-Power

As I create this text I am conscious of other texts and their authors. I am one of many speaking and writing about developing courses to suit the distinctive needs and interests of mature, part-time students. Viewed collectively, those of us within this educational tradition are swimming in a sea of language: our mouths are full of words, our hands are busy writing them and our gaze is filled by them. Yet the pace of change in adult education and the amount of work it involves leaves us little time to question the ocean of words in which we must swim in order to communicate and act. It is difficult for us to resist the temptation of using language as an 'innocent' activity, a means to an end, something we need only in order to reach our ever-higher performance targets as teachers and academic administrators. Language is a vehicle that we can drive where we like: there is little time as we travel for considering the idea that the vehicle might be driving us. Language, like breathing, may be taken for granted: we do not notice it because we do it all the time. While our mouths are full of words, our minds are full of priorities perceived as separate from or more important than the world of language and meaning . The phrase 'it is only semantics' or 'it is merely academic' can still be heard as a way of stopping an argument about words to turn us to more 'important' activities called 'management' or 'action', the very processes which words generate. Words are not only a means to an end: they are one of the controlling 'divinities' that shape our ends. Once we translate the idea of a neutral language into social discourse within historical relationships of power, a different kind of thinking is possible. The following argument is based on the principle that the semantic is at the heart, not the periphery of our activity. The theory from which the argument is derived is not explored in this short paper: the sources of it can be found in many of the well-known major works on language and discourse.

Each of the epigraphs heading this essay can be used as a guide to thinking about curriculum development. In a fantasy that comments on reality, Humpty Dumpty and Alice remind us of the perils involved in communication: anticipating a generation of modern thinkers, they teach us

not to underestimate the difficulty of saying what we mean and meaning what we say. As Foucault recognises, the fact that words are so frequently censored tells us of their power. (I will not forget the businessman who was willing to display a poster for the Workers' Educational Association, provided the word 'workers' was excised from it).While Foucault teaches us the power of discourse, Bakhtin shows us how conflicting verbal styles offer us choices. Language, read carefully, heard critically, does not present a monolithic, uniform, smooth surface. It is more like a palimpsest of differing idiolects, an ancient but ever-changing document riven with the conflicting motives of differing groups from the past and present. The discourse of Adult Education in which curriculum planning takes place is certainly a palimpsest of different styles of language from different periods. Consider some of the major elements in the criss-crossed writing and speaking we inherit: buried deep but still glimpsed is the gentlemanly language of Victorian and Edwardian educational crusades (Albert Mansbridge, 1944); on top of this is the liberal idealism of the post war Labour Government and the Russell Report (R.H. Tawney, 1964); above this is the gender-aware language of the recent past (Deem and Finch, 1986); on top of it all, covering much of our genuine roots, is the contemporary language of funding-driven thinking, managerialism and vocationalism (see the large pile in your in-tray).

I do not think we are the slaves or the masters of this inherited language. When we design courses we have no choice but to write in the tradition of this palimpsest: it is not within our power to begin with a clean sheet. Nevertheless, we can attempt to interpret the palimpsest, saving what we can of the past that still seems relevant, resisting the language we find limiting and distorting, adding what we can to make our words speak to colleagues and students. Influenced by Raymond Williams, I begin by investigating just one *key-word* from the palimpsest of pedagogic terms. The word is 'module', one that belong to the current, dominant discourse, and shapes our thinking about individual courses and programmes of courses

On Models and Modules

We used to organise courses for students: now we market 'modules' for customers. The 'student' who 'studied', who used to learn about a subject, the 'citizen' who once learned in order to participate in democracy, is now, in a reductive transformation, turned into a person who purchases a service, or buys a module that leads to the purchase of another one. The vogue for 'module' needs to be seen in the overall context of the triumph of free-market ideology during the nineteen eighties but it is a term with a long and interesting history. The earliest use of the term 'module' in English appears to be based on the Latin 'modulus' the diminutive of 'modus' or 'measure'. The word was confused in English speech with 'model'. The OED provides two thought-provoking definitions in relation to this history: module meaning 'allotted measure' or 'one's allotted power or capabilities' and module meaning 'the plan or design in little of some large work'. Perhaps worrying for modern users, is the early poetic use of module to mean 'a mere image or counterfeit'.

These early uses seem full of potential for both practical and creative educational applications. However, the term begins to take on its modern guise and influence in relation to things rather than people. In 1946 the eloquently named *Industrial Standardisation* tells us that ' 'Module' furniture is designed on a co-ordinated 6 inch scale so that all pieces are interchangeable'. After American industrial know-how comes the American Space programme and its associated military and technological applications. In 1961 the world learned that the space craft sent to conquer the moon would consist of 'three separate sections or modules: first a command centre module...secondly a propulsion module..; and finally, a so called 'mission' module'. American and Russian space stations were built up from modules with multiple connections that could be joined with other modules in variety of ways. Computer technology also assimilated the term to mean 'One of a number of distinct, well-defined units from which a computer programme may be built up...each of which is complete in itself but bears a definite relationship to the other units' (OED). It is easy to see both the pitfalls and promises that such a term holds. If a complete match can be made between objects and people, between the way *things* may be designed and linked together and the way that human intelligence grows and matures, modularity can be

imagined as the answer to every teacher's prayer. Every course would be distinct, complete in itself, yet capable of being attached to other modules at several points. While each module of learning would make sense on its own, together, all the modules function in unison to make the rocket that takes you on the intellectual equivalent of a journey to the moon and back.

Ask a mature student how he or she learns from experience or study: in my view, the answers are seldom compatible with the concept of modularity. A skill learned in one area may not be interchangeable, or transferable to another specialism: indeed what is learned in one context may have to be unlearned in another. Furthermore, learning does not always arrive in neatly defined, self contained units: rather it is a long and uneven development, fast at some periods, slow at others, sometimes only tenuously linked by threads of memory over long periods of time. The big view, the moments of integration and enlightenment, are not built from equally sized building blocks but from a synthesis of thought and feeling that arrives in unpredictable ways at unexpected times. Rather than supporting this long term process, there is a danger that modularity will contribute to the fragmentation of the long and tenuous thread of learning. It is difficult to imagine any system of learning that does not involve common units of measurement; equally it is important not to make the phenomenon of learning conform to one size of ruler instead of using the ruler to recognise the many different sizes and shapes in which learning comes.

The use of modularity to make education more flexibly acquired at different times and speeds can also become part of a process fragmenting 'graduateness' and the sense that in a full three year degree, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The jury is still out on the language of modules and credit but it has the potential to become one more symptom of the English disease, often diagnosed as 'short-sighted short-termism' (the pursuit of short term profit in a world of boom and bust instead of sustained, long term investment in the future of material and human resources). As we casualise labour with short-term contracts, and lower the expectations of a career or vocation in a chosen lifelong activity, so we risk casualising the educational experience that should enrich work. The very standards which we raise above our educational aims ('continuing' 'lifelong' 'second chance') flag up the antithesis of current employment practices.

On Mazes and Webs

What can current practitioners in Continuing Education do to guide their compulsory swim in the ocean of language? I suggest that we return to some of the original sources of our inspiration and re-interpret them for the modern world. This revolution is as much a turn of the wheel as a change of direction. According to Raymond Williams's etymology, the Latin root of the word 'education' is not 'educere', a leading forth or development, but 'educare' to rear or bring up. Both meanings are creative: the former suggesting that the learner has something to teach, the latter that education is as difficult and sensitive a task as parenting. This latter meaning is certainly in line with Williams's sustained exploration of the many meanings of the term 'culture' (Williams, 1988). Think of it in terms of 'cultivation', and we are once more in the world of tending natural growths, fostering human development, rather than oiling machines. Instead of the mechanical, technological and macho language of today I suggest that we re-invigorate more gentle, sensitive and humane habits of speech. The course designed as a module should be re-conceived as a maze. This is an ancient word, rich in meaning, part of a family of terms including 'labyrinth', 'meander' and 'Troytown' which lurk in place names, dialect, archaeological evidence, architectural decorations, descriptions of the human body and the natural world. To be 'mazed' in its earliest sense not only meant both to be bewildered but to be wrapped in thought (Matthews, 1922).

John Fowles, contemporary novelist and thinker, uses the famous Hampton Court Maze to explain learning: the attendant who sits in the high chair overlooking the twists and turns of the maze knows everything and learns nothing. He can help others but he cannot learn himself. In order to learn you have to become a participant not an observer, in order to find truths you have to be lost. It is necessary to be 'mazed' and amazed: to be both disorientated and astonished, in

order to learn lessons that transform your outlook. By that difficult but creative process called trial and error, you may avoid the Minotaur and discover Ariadne's thread. Nevertheless, while the lost one finds understanding, Fowles also argues that the person who learns most from the maze is its inventor. If you wish to emulate the inventive powers of Daedalus, it is ultimately necessary not only to enter the maze but to make one, to design your own ways of learning (Fowles, 1978). I think that for many mature learners, and I refer to both teachers and students here, knowledge is much more like an intricate, baffling and intriguing maze than a tower block with clearly divided levels. Modules set neatly defined objectives but mazes demand that you meander in ways that allow for serendipity. The maze metaphor, old but made new, may guide us now. Rather than a module we need a 'model': a device that allows you to question and explore reality with imagination and creativity.

Ariadne's thread leads me to another key word that belongs both in the ancient world and the modern world: I refer to the 'web' whether in its world wide technological form or in the sense of the myriad connections that knowledge makes in the mind. Webs in nature are small miracles easily overlooked: their fine filaments are strong yet flexible, their threads are often longer than you think, connecting unexpected places. Webs of deeply felt knowledge are also miracles, spun out of the entrails of experience, suffering and surprise. One module may fit with one or two more but webs of knowledge have connections that increase exponentially inspiring the student with that sense of wonder and curiosity which motivates continuous learning. It is easy to get lost on the web, and also easy to find connections. In the best webs, a tremor in one part is felt throughout the whole. This is the 'connectivity' that 'discrete modules' risk losing. E.M. Forster's much applied dictum 'only connect' was actually used by him in a novel contrasting prose and passion, a world of 'telegrams and anger' and a world of feelings. Nevertheless, his coining serves to express that sense of enlightenment which happens when all kinds of knowledges combine into wholes. The now forming character of the World Wide Web suggests that technology does not have to dominate the human but may express its complexity, its blend of order and chaos. The prefix 'multi' is required to characterise learning on the Web: it is multi media, multi-voiced and multi-narrative. In other words, a rich Web text communicates in language, sounds and pictures; is often made and changed by several authors, and is read in differing orders by readers following more than one path through its information. Through modern computers such a text approaches the complexity and participative choices offered by the maze and the web of old mythology. As more courses, called modules or not, are available on the Web, the opportunities for re-engaging the technological with the human are immense.

Whose Words Make the Future

Can you judge a word by the company it keeps? Are the words that enter our minds and mouths derived from the myths embodying ancestral wisdom and the practice of adult learning, or are they imported terms from the world of buying and selling, or the world of military and industrial technology? Of course, in one sense most words are 'imports': that is to say they belong to many vast fields of meaning that cannot be confined to one type of activity (explore the paradigmatic and syntagmatic connections of signs in Barthes, 1962). None of the words explored here can be called 'pure'; 'module' has less connection with the modelling power of imagination than with the world of things made by the 'military-industrial complex'. 'Maze' and 'web' have a different type of pedigree, linked to both ancient and modern, functioning on a multiple plane of the human, the natural and the technological. In the wider context of the discourse of adult education, I see 'module' as having a mainly masculine gender. The chivalric patriarchy of Mansbridge and Tawney cannot be revived in a world less blind to the needs of women learners; nevertheless, the current, dominant discourse retains a patriarchal, military quality: students are grouped in 'cohorts', problems are solved by a 'Task Force', the new generation of professionals 'hit the ground running'. The cluster of meaning around 'Ariadne', 'Arachne' and 'arachnid' suggests less 'macho', more subtle ways of conceptualising education. Instead of invading and conquering, Ariadne and Arachne were wise women who beat the monster and challenged the god-Kings by spinning a web of wisdom, threading the maze of learning with a link all the way from the centre to the exit. This is to say nothing of those three women who spin the web of life, measure it and

cut it. Despite the potential power of this verbal field, it remains subordinate to the dominant mode of communication at present.

It would be naive to under-estimate the power of the dominant discourse and to over-estimate the power of individuals to resist or change it. Nevertheless, I am encouraged to think that counter-dominant language is possible by the theory of Bakhtin and by the fact that many adult educators are bi-lingual: they speak the language of empire-building at committee meetings and the language of toleration and mutuality in the class-room; their memos are warlike and their comments on essays are gentle. As managers they are condemned to a state of Orwellian 'double-think'; they speak and behave in one way while they actually believe in another. The humane speech that has been preserved in the dialogue between tutor and student, should also be applied to the process designing the courses within which the dialogue is made possible.

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A re-formation of liberal values: embedding transferable skills in the adult education curriculum

Roger Fieldhouse

The last two decades have witnessed a relentless drive towards vocational relevance and accredited instrumentalism in adult continuing education and this has, of course, influenced the development of the curricula. This impetus was at the heart of the white papers of 1991 and the education acts of 1988 and 1992. In 1991 the Government made clear its belief that:

> ...it is important that good quality education should be available to adults to help them improve their qualifications, update their skills and seek advancement in their present career or in a new career. (*Education and Training for the 21st Century* (1991), vol.2, para. 3.2.)

and that:

> ...funding should be concentrated on the kinds of education for adults listed in paragraph 3.2 above. (Ibid, para. 3.5.)

The Government also made clear that:

> The reforms are directed not only at structures but also at qualifications. We are in the process of creating a comprehensive and coherent national framework of vocational qualifications. (Lord Belstead, Paymaster General, introducing the second reading of the 1992 bill in the House of Lords, Hansard, 21 Nov. 1991, col.1023.)

Early in 1992 Government ministers stated further that:

> Scheduie 2 (of the bill) encapsulates the courses which the Government consider to be a matter of national economic and educational priority. (Tim Eggar, Minister of State, Standing Committee F, 20 Feb. 1992, col.223.)

and that:

> Schedule 2 describes our national priorities. (Kenneth Clarke, Secretary of State, ibid, 3 March 1992, col.200.)

However, it has long been argued that there is a real danger in reducing adult education to such narrow, functional goals, particularly vocational ones:

> In an age of rapid change, narrow, practical skills become rapidly obsolete and, on their own, they will not equip anybody to make a humanly successful job of anything..(Howard, 1987.)

> In a rapidly changing society, the best education is general rather than specific, giving students the capacities to learn, the 'thinking skills', the intellectual flexibility that will enable them to adjust to economic changes and technological advances. (Norton Grubb, 1987.)

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> The universities must avoid being seduced by the more instrumental aspects of the current prevailing emphasis on skill training and up-dating. They must avoid simplistic reductionism - reducing continuing education to a narrow training role. (Fieldhouse, 1988. p.57.)

A recent project on 'training pedagogical personnel in labour market policy measures' undertaken by the German Institute of Adult Education similarly concluded that:

> ...under present social and economic conditions it is necessary to expand the concept of 'work' from the exclusive aspect of gainful employment to include the idea of 'socially useful work', 'community work' or 'public work'...Advanced vocational training must redefine itself against this background of labour market conditions. Technical and functional job qualifications as an aid in reintegration into the primary labour market is no longer enough. (Bruening, 1997, p.151)

However, despite these and many, many other arguments for a broad curriculum, the predominant current assumption in British adult education is that it should concentrate on competencies, skills and knowledge of immediate relevance to the employment market, and be assessed in ways which will provide qualifications for gainful employment. It is not the intention of this paper to dismiss the need for such relevance, but to suggest that this can be achieved more effectively by different means.

If, as Bruening and others argue, it is no longer enough to think in terms of (re)integrating people into the primary labour market, but rather we must widen the goal to embrace socially useful work, public work and community action, then the required skills should be broad and transferable rather than narrow and specific. This demands a fundamental revision of the curriculum of formal adult education, to make 'transferable skills of citizenship' the heart of that curriculum. These should include:

> ...the ability to identify problems, find information, locate issues in a political and social context; to develop the sense of worth of the individual through both a knowledge that they have something worthwhile to say and the ability to speak in a way that will be heard; and to be able to work effectively in groups to achieve common goals and to be able to deal with difference, diversity and, at times, conflict. These skills can be learnt in any adult classroom and will then be available to the learner to be transferred to other outside situations if considered desirable and/or appropriate. (Benn & Fieldhouse, 1997, pp.63-4)

Larsson (1997) makes a similar point when he describes an 'alternative conception' to a society focused on work. This 'alternative conception' is:

> multicultural, with many different spheres working beside each other. In this conception life and work are based on knowledge that is situated in specific contexts...'Culture' and experiences are more and more important both in terms of economy and everyday life...Aesthetic and cultural activities become more and more important...The dividing line between work and leisure becomes blurred. Generally society is conceived as flexible, even confusing...In (this) conception the implication is a different kind of view on education. The most prominent side of this is the lack of belief that the future can be planned in a grand scale. Instead focus is on the flexibility and the multifaceted nature of life and work...Aesthetic and cultural knowledge becomes important, beside or in combination with technology. Social competencies and skills in deliberations to form local action are in the forefront. (pp.18-9)

Bruening (1997) describes an example of how 'general, political, cultural and vocational education' can 'forge meaningful links with each other and result in greater competence not attainable through purely functional job qualification programmes' (p.151). This was the

'Chronicler Project' in Mecklenberg, Western Pommerania, which celebrated its 1000th anniversary in 1995. As part of that anniversary, the local employment office sponsored the project in which a group of unemployed people investigated historical documents in order to produce a more complete and accurate history of the region. Equally divided between measures for employment and job qualification, provisions were made primarily for job-related training in project management, computer work, use and analysis of historical sources, archival documentation, typing, multi-media techniques, documentation, and so on. An individual goal for the participants in this critical examination of history became one of making the search for self-identity easier and strengthening personal self-confidence, and thus contributing to personal stability. (Ibid, p.150)

The project director's conclusion was that even if the project did not generate any jobs on the primary labour market, project participants discovered that meaningful work outside regular forms of gainful employment are possible. (Ibid, p.151). The real significance of this is that an ostensibly vocationally-orientated project developed a range of transferable skills useful for gainful employment but which could be equally applied to all kinds of other 'meaningful' and 'socially useful' work.

This restores the notion of 'liberalism' to the centrality of the adult education curriculum, no matter whether it is ostensibly vocational or non-vocational, accredited or non-accredited. Those are lesser sub-divisions of what should be seen in the broadest sense as liberal adult education which is

> ...concerned with the education of the individual either for personal intellectual advancement or to make the individual a better-educated citizen. This liberal education is thus concerned with developing the students' critical faculties and their ability to question all existing assumptions and to enable them to formulate, or at least understand, alternative interpretations....This process should open out and indeed challenge the students' conceptions of their own environment, widen their experience and understanding, and thereby increase their awareness of alternative conceptions. (Fieldhouse, 1985, p.2)

This concept of adult education for social participation as well as for vocational relevance used to be a fundamental tenet of British adult education, but in recent years it has become very largely hidden, if not altogether invisible. Now is the time not only to restore it to the curriculum, but to put it at the top of the agenda and to make it an explicit objective (Benn & Fieldhouse, 1997, p.64). These transferable 'thinking skills' will not only be more valuable than narrower skills training as preparation for the world or work, but they will be equally valuable to the many and growing number of people who, for one reason or another, cannot expect to be (re)integrated into the primary labour market, but who would welcome opportunities and help to become more involved in society by participating in socially useful work, voluntary activities and public affairs.

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Developing a history curriculum for adult learners - a case study

Lynne Thompson

It has recently been argued that adult learners may be disadvantaged in terms of the (generally) vocational irrelevance of the university continuing education curriculum, and, insofar as the history curriculum is concerned, its adherence to a 'comfortable' version of the past. It is suggested that many historians are not engaging with or reflecting upon the current state of play within their own discipline (or what is left of it!) or, if they are, they do not appear to be transmitting the 'new history' to their students (Chase,1996; 56-59).

Chase defines the 'new' history as not being confined by textual or documentary material, but engaging with a multiplicity of sources, and challenging empirically based scholarship by the use of

> reverence for received opinion, the wish to resist privileging some people and/or their cultural productions, over others.....emphasis on subjectivity and relativity in knowledge and language (in order to) encourage critical reflectiveness (Chase, 1996:57)

Though Fieldhouse suggests that Chase overstates the postmodernist case, and oversimplifies his attack on his main target- the mainstream university curriculum - (Fieldhouse 1996 a:118) there is much to be gained at practitioner level from utilising some of the vocationally oriented and 'new' historical approaches which Chase advocates. The more that university continuing education 'mimics yet further the conventions of British historical scholarship' as it becomes integrated into the mainstream of higher education, the more difficult it will be for continuing education historians to preserve the distinctiveness of their approach to the subject (Chase,1996:59). Since part of this assimilatory process includes the adoption of accreditation schemes, and the quality assurance mechanisms which accompany them, adults who study history find themselves faced with an increasingly fragmented and prescriptive approach to the subject, in contrast to the more intensive and longer study enjoyed by undergraduates, whilst at the same time losing the opportunity to explore history as an autonomous group in the company of a tutor, at their own pace, and without the pressures engendered by assessment. This paper describes the development of a history curriculum for adult learners at Exeter which attempts to overcome some of these problems.

History and the continuing education curriculum

Archaeology represents one of the most popular subjects offered on the Combined Studies Programme at Exeter, a factor explained by the presence of a strong and dedicated team of tutors, and, perhaps, by its apparent indistinguishability from history as it has been traditionally offered by Exeter. Both subjects may be seen as being market led, informed by a regional focus reflecting the interests of many students who have retired to the South-West or have refocused their cultural aspirations around 'place'. There is, however, a further reason why adult students may opt for archaeology rather than history, and which is of considerable importance when attempting to redress the balance of recruitment between the two subjects. As Husbands has suggested, (1996:75) the way adults think about the past is informed by contemporary concerns, which might equally suggest that during (current) times of acute social and technological change, students might opt for the safe option by studying archaeology and Egyptology (a component of archaeology provision at Exeter) both of which subjects are very much distanced in time from

the present. Moreover, the view of a 'sanitised' past as offered by much of the local heritage industry may also influence the choice of the adult student in favour of 'country house and castle' type history classes.

Given the probable shift in recruitment away from the traditional continuing education student, a debate about what the market should constitute has ensued between those tutors who regard themselves primarily as local, and traditional historians (' history finishes in the eighteenth century'), those who prefer students to be aware of the 'grand narratives' of social, and more modern history, and those (often the same tutors) who wish to promote the cultural and 'linguistic turn'. Although this debate has reached almost schismatic proportions within the discipline of history itself, the development of a continuing education history curriculum cannot ignore the complex intellectual and pragmatic questions which arise from it. How far can we proceed along a new and unfamiliar path without jeopardising the future, since students may vote with their feet? How many 'new' students are there in reality, who may be attracted to the 'new' history? To what extent should the traditional, continuing education

> antiquarian impulse.. the investigation of history out of curiosity for one's own past... or the study of small communities.. be subjugated to theories concepts, themes, techniques, methods (and languages) from other disciplines which characterise 'mainstream' history? (Rogers, 1989:24-25).

On the basis of these arguments, then, it might be appropriate to use a variety of approaches, and effect a compromise, balanced solution, allowing for the views of part-time tutors who make a significant contribution to the delivery of newly accredited courses.

A balanced history curriculum?

One only has to consult the many university continuing education prospectuses which include history in order to confirm that such a compromise has taken place. *Sources for Local and Family History: Using Documents for Community and Family History; Guild and Parish in Medieval and Tudor Cornwall; West Country Houses* represent some of the 'standard' local, regional and documentary based courses in Exeter's Part-time Prospectus, for example. In general, there are few courses which attempt either to venture into the twentieth century, or to use other than documentary material, such as oral history, in order to provide a focus for adult learners. There is some evidence that the 'regional and the local' are being put together, as Marshall recommended some time ago (Marshall, 1978: 10) but is not clear as to whether such courses are underpinned by any broader issues or themes. In the absence of such conceptual frameworks, as Schurer now suggests, 'there is no such thing as local history' (Schurer,1991:106), a situation which may leave some university continuing education departments vulnerable to criticism about the academic basis of certain courses.

For these reasons, and also in terms of balancing the history curriculum, Exeter's adult education courses also include modern history topics and methodologies which are specifically designed to address current academic debates. *A People's History: Devon in the Second World War*, for example, enables groups of adult learners to design, implement and evaluate oral history questionnaires on evacuation and the Exeter and Plymouth blitzes, in order to assess the extent to which the nation 'pulled together' on the home front. Such courses on twentieth century history would be easily transferable to other regions which acted as reception areas for evacuees, experienced the Baedeker raids, and which often contain 'old' university continuing education departments. The 'new' history curriculum, whilst not slavishly imitating mainstream provision, should be designed in a way which resonates with students' experiences, builds confidence, and, as the best tradition of continuing education allows, enables students to discover history for themselves rather than accepting other people's perceptions of it.

The new history curriculum

Chase notes that adults 'come to the study of history largely expecting 'the truth' about the past' to be provided by nothing more contentious than the 'missing knowledge' gleaned from current research. As such, however, 'there is always the danger that a (continuing education) class will turn into a group of tourists, passively consuming stuff about history' no matter how effectively it is taught (Chase, 1996:57). He therefore raises questions about what students should be 'told' about the nature of history, particularly within the current post modern climate. It could be argued that an uncompromisingly hard-line, postmodernist approach might be inappropriate to new students, for example (always assuming that tutors wish to go down this road) but it might prove to be attractive to both parties if they agreed that a more 'debunking' or iconoclastic approach to history could be employed. The intent of such a strategy would not be to unsettle students into a permanently relativist position, but, rather, to enable them to appreciate that history is ' a constant dialogue; a permanent dialectic' (Fieldhouse, 1996b, 14). Within such a dialectic, the dialogue between local and academic historians can also be more easily appreciated.

One example of this approach has been utilised by a Devon team of tutors who, in order to introduce history to new students fuse the local, regional and 'safe' approach with a more critical, Stracheyesque perspective in a two term course on *Eminent Victorians in Devon* . Using the lives of relatively unknown 'movers and shakers' of Victorian society who were born in or lived in the county, (for example, Philip Gosse, Amelia Griffiths, Jesse Collings) this course has encouraged students to conduct individual research into local history and literature, on their own or the group's behalf. Thus the distinctiveness of the continuing education history curriculum is being both enriched and preserved. *Eminent Victorians* has also enabled students to see the wider, national 'picture' in terms of conflicts between science and religion, the position of women, class relationships, the 'land' question, and so forth, and to appreciate the cultural and ideological shifts of the period through the means of auto/biographical rather than documentary 'evidence'. The advantage of such courses is that they can be made applicable to many counties, regions or historical periods, once some preliminary 'digging' has been undertaken. A variety of subjects can be represented within the same course, for example literature, archaeology, natural science, visual arts, and interdisciplinary themes can be introduced, such as interpretations of the 19th century landscape.

Another example is a level one course on *British Heritage Studies* with a target group of students in mind who work within the heritage industry, National Trust volunteers and so forth. Students on such courses are expected to demonstrate their communication and group based skills partially through the assessment process, whilst acquiring a wider appreciation of the academic debates on issues surrounding the nature and management of heritage. As Chase notes, a 'closer engagement' between continuing education and the heritage industry would 'stimulate its students to a more critical and reflective consumption' of its products (Chase, 1996:59). Such an engagement would also provide an added stimulus to historians and part-time tutors who wish to promote interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning, as well as addressing some of the issues posed by those who espouse visually representative, or 'living' history.

Some shorter courses might be used as a means of attracting students to the nature of the 'new' history. An example whereby art history and historical visual sources have been fused is *Arts, Architecture and the Building of Castle Drogo*, a course which utilised this National Trust property in Devon as a focus for examining the work of Lutyens and the life of the Castle owner, Julius Drewe, founder of the Home and Colonial Stores. This popular course aimed to demonstrate the 'missing history' in the way in which the Trust presented the property, especially since it excluded much of Drewe's entrepreneurial and imperially based past. Students were also introduced to the debates surrounding Wiener's critique of English culture, the decline of the 'industrial sprit' and the extent to which this critique could be applied to the builders of many 19th century country houses in the South-West. As in *Eminent Victorians in Devon*, this model could be adapted by other continuing education departments in regions where there are National Trust or other

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properties with a similar history, and where tutors wish to acclimatise students into the critical and questioning processes involved in the study of modern, cultural and social history.

Towards a skills based history curriculum

It is often forgotten how far the continuing education curriculum incorporates the development of vocational skills for adults. To this end, essays or similar other written work in parts of the adult continuing education curriculum might be supplemented by other forms of assessment, especially if students are increasingly expected to develop particularly presentational and practical skills not normally associated with the study of history in higher education. One solution might be the production and presentation of a Community History project, building on the collaborative group work which is characteristic of many local history classes, and utilising the androgogical processes 'involving learning and thinking with others who are learning and thinking' (Allman and Mackie, 1981: 15). The assessed project could be targeted at students who had a strong but not necessarily academically-oriented interest in history, who would devise a short village history, educational resource pack or town trail. More academically-routed students could focus upon a particular archive in a Records Office or local library, creating a bibliographical or users' guide. Each project could in part be peer assessed, part tutor assessed, and include a group presentation. The taught component of such a course would be minimal, enabling tutors to focus upon the transferable skills which students would be expected to demonstrate. Most importantly, the outcome of such projects would be of general benefit to the community, thus reinforcing the continuing education 'ideological agenda' of 'learning for citizenship' (Benn and Fieldhouse, 1995. See also Fieldhouse's paper in this collection).

The acquisition of transferable skills via the continuing education history curriculum may not always be realisable through group work. 'Problem solving' can be effected by abandoning the traditional, chronologically based approach to teaching in favour of themes and issues which relate to a very short period of time. For example, the 1890s or the 1930s provide adults and tutors with a range of stimulating and contentious debates to sample. This approach can be further developed by comparing the experiences of those in other countries, or regions during the decades in question, resources (particularly cinematographic) allowing. It is, perhaps, this latter caveat which prevents many continuing educationalists from providing adults with the challenges inherent in abandoning the safety of centuries-long, and consequently, more superficially covered courses.

A more vocationally oriented continuing education history curriculm should focus not only on the professional, but the personal development of the adult learner, and again, the study of local history is particularly appropriate here. There appears to be a number of students on local history courses who would like to become more active in their local history societies, perhaps acquiring a volunteer 'leadership role' through learning. (*Local History Magazine*, 1996:15). Whilst participation in an accredited Community History project would benefit such students, their confidence and personal development would be greatly enhanced by individual research on a local history topic. As Mills indicates, such acknowledged competence in local history may also provide opportunities for this category of student to become involved in aspects of the heritage industry, thereby ensuring that the tourist literature produced is both accurate and informative (Mills, 1994:227).

There may also be other ways of helping local history groups by the provision of introductory courses on *Themes and Issues for Local Historians* which provide students with the necessary conceptual as well as paleographical tools with which to interpret documents of interest. The duration of such courses could be dictated by the length of time covered, by a specific event or period, such as the Civil or Napoleonic Wars, or the Black Death, or by a specific topic, such as housing the people. Local groups could then continue their own enquiries under the direction of a volunteer leader and submit work for accreditation. Credit awarded in such instances would not

only be a recognition of educational achievement but also function as a legitimating agency whereby groups could obtain funding from local authorities or business sponsors, the whole process being facilitated by a continuing education department.

Gender, autobiography, and history

If it has proved difficult to wean some students away from the more traditional approaches to the continuing education history curriculum, it can be equally difficult to introduce feminist history to adults. One can argue that specific, women-centred courses need not be promoted so long as feminist concerns permeate the curriculum, an issue which again would promote the distinctiveness of continuing education as opposed to the 'malestream' history curriculum in many universities, and especially since so many adult students are women. Yet historians may have a special obligation to promote autobigraphically based courses, in order that students may become aware of the interconnecting boundaries between history and fiction, thereby using the self as a valid evidential source. There are, of course, great difficulties in persuading conventional historians as to the value of such sources. As Elliott states, the use of personal, autobiographical experience is often unacceptable in terms of assessed work (Elliott, 1995: 297) but from a continuing education perspective, there is much value to be gained by an examination of key issues regarding self-representation by women not only in terms of life-writing, but also other forms such as self-portraiture in photography and painting which can be considered in a history curriculum It should not, therefore, be beyond the wit of university continuing educationalists to devise courses on *Gender, Autobiography and History* which would not be perceived as 'soft' credit. After all, labour and oral history courses as pioneered by others in continuing education provide useful examples upon which to build.

Some conclusions

I have attempted to show in this paper that the 'new' history has direct relevance to the strengths represented in the traditional continuing education curriculum, particularly in terms of local history, and of more vocationally designed courses. I have also outlined some of the problems and challenges which face continuing education departments which may well be taking some risks in re-orienting the history curriculum during the present economic climate in higher education, in the manner I have just described. Experience suggests, however, that we should continue to have confidence in the pioneering tradition of continuing education, its ability to anticipate the needs of adult learners, and the way in which it can act as a catalyst for much good practice in mainstream provision.

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A part-time humanities degree off campus: factors in curriculum design

Ella Westland

As changes in student demand and funding formulas provide the carrot and stick to move British adult education further into the mainstream, departments like Continuing & Adult Education at Exeter University are building on their old system of certificated courses in order to provide complete degrees. Such developments are very much in tune with current mission statements. ACE Departments, committed to extending flexible part-time HE provision for adults, are at the same time making an important contribution to the regional remit of their universities and to the national Funding Council's aspiration to expand the undergraduate base and include a greater proportion of non-traditional students.

At the University of Exeter's outpost in Cornwall, some ninety miles from the main campus, students are about to enter Level 2 for the first time. A new structure has been developed that enables students to progress from Level 1 Certificates to a BA Honours degree in Historical and Cultural Studies. This article outlines the structure and content of the Cornwall programme, identifying the key factors that have influenced curriculum development, and asks finally how a university degree delivered from an adult education centre does or should differ from an on-campus programme.

Structure, Sustainability and Key Skills

In the current economic climate, the unbreakable rule underlying curriculum design in the ACE sector is that a programme must be adequately resourced and financially viable. Reliable recruitment is fundamental: therefore a part-time degree must answer a recognised education need locally, and meet the demands and expectations of its potential students. We identified a gap in the Cornwall HE market defined by type of student (adult part-time) and subject area (the humanities, discussed in more detail below). There has been a detectable shift in the type of student taking our Level 1 Certificates in Cornwall over the past five years, as the traditional extra-mural student learning for individual fulfilment has been gradually replaced by students in their 30s and 40s with the medium-term aim of getting a degree and thereby improving their career options. Our experience of students on local Access courses, who rarely came onto our Certificates, was that their sights were also set on a degree: no other qualification would do. There are also long-standing adult education students looking for progression beyond Certificate level for personal interest.

So the demand was there, but was it great enough to sustain a six-year degree programme? The total population of Cornwall, from Bude to Penzance is only half a million – roughly the same as Bristol – and the demand for FE/HE is spread over a huge range of academic and vocational qualifications. Our first cautious projection was of an annual intake of 10 students onto the post-Certificate degree programme at Level 2, with an anticipated drop-out rate of 70%. The only feasible structure that would ensure the degree's long-term viability was a rolling programme. We therefore devised the following framework, building on our established two-year Certificates:

Year of Study	Level	Credits	
TWO-YEAR ROLLING PROGRAMME [or extended Combined Studies pattern]			
1 & 2	1	120	= CERTIFICATE
THREE-YEAR ROLLING PROGRAMME			
3	2	60	2 x 30-credit taught modules
4	2/3	60	2 x 30-credit taught modules
5	3	60	2 x 30-credit taught modules
4, 5 or 6	2/3	60	2 x 30-credit dissertation modules [1 at Level 2; 1 at Level 3]
			= BA (Hons)

The Department has experience of delivering a rolling programme, since our Theology and Humanities Certificates already operate two-year courses with a fresh intake each year. Students demonstrably benefit in many ways from a mix of newcomers and more experienced classmates. But there are obvious implications for the curriculum in that modules cannot assume prior knowledge or post-Level 1 skills shared by the whole group. Another consequence of the post-Certificate rolling programme is that students will be taking the same module at different levels. The University would not agree to the system adopted in some of the new universities, which is particularly appropriate for part-time adult students, whereby post-Level 1 modules are assessed at the same level and averaged for degree classification purposes. Therefore different assessment strategies have to be devised for students taking the same module at Levels 2 or 3.

The programme is classroom based. It is offered at a single central location to maximise access for students in different corners of the county. This is a traditional delivery mode which makes no use – at least during this initial phase of its development – of the distance learning computer facilities now increasingly available across the region. Instead it makes a virtue of weekly classroom contact, in response to the explicit demand from Access and Certificate students for continuing face-to-face tuition and group support. This is what differentiates our programme most clearly from the Open University, the main alternative route for this type of student.

The modest income and resources available on a small-scale programme mean restricted student choice: this has to be a curriculum with no guaranteed options. However, CATS enables students to import modules from other institutions. (University regulations allow students to bring in up to 180 relevant credits at Levels 1 and 2.) The obvious source of options for students wishing to diversify their degree is the Open University, and advice is readily available on OU courses that would be acceptable. If recruitment proves more elastic, there is always the possibility of adding options to the degree programme: one free-standing module has already been offered, and an appropriate module from a theology programme run in parallel to the degree will also be available to students nearly every year.

Special attention has been given to curriculum objectives beyond the subject boundaries of the degree. Transferable skills and other desirable learning outcomes were identified, which ranged from 'scholarly concern for accuracy' to 'engagement in current intellectual debates and involvement in academic networks' and 'awareness of the relevance of their studies to their roles as responsible and questioning members of society'.

Overcoming the particular problems faced by students in Cornwall was also acknowledged as an integral dimension of the curriculum. Students are doubly disadvantaged by the distance between

Cornwall and the main campus, which reduces the learning resources available, and by the distance between individual students, which makes group work difficult to organise and weakens the peer support network. The main tool here is the Summer Learning Pack that students complete before entering Level 2, which encourages students to explore local resources and find ways of working in groups of three using various modes of communication. A debriefing session in the autumn is intended to pool students' knowledge of local resources, from museums and galleries to Open Learning centres offering IT facilities, and to lead students to appreciate the value of the 'survival skills' they have learned while working off campus over the summer. This meeting will draw attention to local resources which are not available outside the county, in order to underline the potential advantages of working in Cornwall. What should begin to emerge is an awareness of the relationship between the culture of a 'periphery' like Cornwall and 'centres' like London and university towns, a theme that will be threaded through several subject areas of the syllabus.

The Content of the Curriculum

As universities move gradually towards a skills-based rather than subject-based curriculum, and shift the emphasis from content to process, any discussion of subject areas begins to sound old-fashioned. In practice, there is no aspect of designing a degree that is more contentious. Academics may be able to agree on the desirability of such general propositions as incorporating key skills into the curriculum. They will accept parameters of marketability and resourcing. But when it comes to making fundamental decisions about the philosophical and pedagogical principles underpinning the syllabus, everyone involved in the planning process is likely to have different and passionately held views.

a) defining the subject area

The pragmatic considerations of student demand and staffing resources were of necessity at the forefront in delineating the general subject area for the Cornwall degree. It was crucial to find the right niche in the local FE/HE market which, as in the rest of the country, is patchy and volatile. A significant gap was identified in the humanities, traditionally the strength of extra-mural liberal education programmes: specifically, in the arts, theology, history and regional studies. The degree could therefore build on subject areas already represented at Level 1 by the Department's established Certificates in Humanities, Literature, Theology, Regional History and Combined Studies, which were well covered in terms of staffing by an experienced team of full-time and part-time tutors.

'Historical and Cultural Studies' was eventually defined as the area for the new Level 2/ 3 degree programme. Single honours degrees in, say, literature or history, would not attract sufficient students – indeed Cornwall successfully developed its interdisciplinary Humanities Certificate five years ago to overcome the recruitment problem posed by single subject Certificates. The possibility of providing a degree focusing on regional studies was rejected at an early stage, since potential students looking to a career change or higher level study would assume that a broad-based humanities degree was more highly valued. The syllabus also had to allow for students planning to enter school teaching so that they could focus on a subject area acceptable for entry onto a PGCE course.

The title proved a problem, since our experience of marketing the Humanities Certificate suggested that the term 'Humanities' did not appeal to students. 'Historical and Cultural Studies' seemed descriptive enough to attract adults interested in history or the arts, and broad enough to enable students to bring in a wide range of modules through credit transfer under the umbrella of 'cultural studies'.

b) defining the humanities

Disciplinary divisions have proved notoriously unstable over the past decade. The breaking down of academic boundaries, and the broadening of student choice through modularisation schemes, have both contributed to uncertainties about the principles that should govern a humanities curriculum (Middlehurst and Barnett, 1994). There are many past models for multi-disciplinary undergraduate degrees, among them the pioneering programmes of 'new' universities like Keele in the 1960s, the imaginative courses developed by Humanities Departments in the former polytechnics, the eclectic curriculum of North American universities, Women's Studies programmes and the Open University. However, radical and accelerating changes in the organisation of knowledge and understanding have now overtaken the assumptions underlying looser multi-disciplinary programmes and, at the other end of the academic spectrum, have breached the defences of the most traditional single-subject departments. As a result, lecturers trained as specialists in well-defined academic fields have found themselves enthused and confused, often in equal measure (Bocock, 1994), about the potential for developing and delivering new programmes.

How does a humanities syllabus cope with the number of potential disciplines and their almost limitless borders? What philosophies and methodologies should it prioritise? Given such vast scope, the personal beliefs, preferences and specialisms of the staff planning the curriculum soon manifest themselves. There was agreement that we were committed to the existence and importance of discipline-specific skills (analytical tools, methodological choices), and wanted students to have the opportunity to develop and apply those skills throughout the Level 2/3 programme. We therefore concentrated on two disciplines: history (mainly social history) and the arts (mainly literature), which would be studied in each year. Students without any prior training in history or literature would be required to work through a summer study pack before entering Level 2. We chose historical periodicisation and an orientation towards Britain as straightforward means of defining and linking the modules (and playing to the strengths of the teaching team). Each 30-credit module was designed around three areas of focus which could be updated in response to new trends in these academic fields.

Year A:	Module 1 -	Historical Studies 1750-1840: Industrialisation and the Creation of Modern Identity
	Module 2 -	Literary Studies 1750-1840 The Romantic Period: Writing in History
Year B:	Module 1 -	Historical Studies 1840-1920: Social Continuities and Political Change
	Module 2 -	Literary Studies 1840-1920: The Victorians and After: Writing in History
Year C:	Module 1 -	Historical Studies 1920-2000: Postwar Society and the Postmodern World
	Module 2 -	Literary / Cultural Studies 1920-2000

A key objective was to explore various connections between the disciplines – consequently the two modules offered each year are taught in alternate blocks with occasional inter-disciplinary dayschools. Thus a block of Module A1 considers the cultural impact of industrialisation, followed immediately by a block of Module A2 which analyses landscape in romantic writing; C1 and C2 use television, film and popular genre fiction (as art and history) in a study of Britain in the 1950s. Inherent in this complementary structure is the assumption that historians can make use of the arts, and that the arts benefit from being studied (though not exclusively) in relation to social structures and other ideological discourses of the same historical period. The flexibility of the syllabus gives the option of introducing Cornish Studies as a special focus into any module. The overall syllabus gives prominence to dominant cross-disciplinary theories of the 1990s, such as cultural construction, which can be defined and deconstructed in shared workshop sessions.

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Entering the Mainstream

Now that the euphoria of having successfully piloted an off-campus degree through the university validation system is fading, it is time to reflect on what we have done and the compromises we may have made in the process. Cornwall – an economically and educationally disadvantaged county – now has fresh provision for adult students. This is a legitimate development of the old extra-mural dream of educational opportunities for all: taking university courses, and now university qualifications, to students outside the campus. But is the aim of ACE departments simply to deliver part-time degrees outside the university and/or outside the usual pattern of full-time, day-time provision? Or do we want these degrees to be in some ways distinctive, reflecting ACE Departments' long experience of adult learning and their tradition of teaching underpinned by political commitment?

If we are attempting to replicate the campus experience, we are bound to fall short. We cannot provide the buzz of student crowds, the impressive banks of computer terminals or the atmosphere of a large university library. But we can offer excellent substitutes. ACE Departments have behind them a tradition of working with adults, responding to their needs and demands, respecting their strengths and seeing their past learning and experience as a vital resource. They understand the typical problems of wobbly self-esteem experienced by adult learners, and appreciate the competing demands of study, workplace, family and community. They value learners' personal fulfilment, and the development of their confidence and skills, as much as their imbibing of knowledge. They can afford to be more supportive and flexible with their small classes of adult learners than big university departments faced with large lecture halls of young students. When it comes to wobbly self-esteem among the teaching staff, as university lecturers struggle with the threats to their professional identity posed by far-reaching curriculum changes, seasoned extra-mural tutors are less likely than teachers on campus to be over-sensitive about changes in their role and image. Few adult education staff have enjoyed the mystique of the university lecturer; most are happy to present themselves as facilitators of independent learning rather than founts of wisdom, and are well used to renegotiating the roles of teacher and student in different learning situations. Indeed it could be convincingly claimed that adult education practice is more relevant and adaptable to the new undergraduate patterns emerging on campus, where the forces of widening access and widening the curriculum are at work, than the culture of the older universities.

Yet we should feel less confident about the motivation and ability of ACE departments to keep a politically radical edge to the curriculum. Although one applicant for the Cornwall degree has already commented on the 'feminist' leanings of the syllabus, in response to such signals as the inclusion of women writers like Mary Shelley and the appearance of the term 'gender', educationalists would hardly classify such minor adjustments to the canon and mainstream approaches to cultural analysis as fundamentally feminist (see Pritchard Hughes, 1995). And on the bias in the Cornwall syllabus towards cultural construction, there is a salutary reminder from the Marxist critic Terry Eagleton in a recent issue of *New Literary History* as to how far postmodernist theory has taken us beyond the politically grounded cultural studies of Raymond Williams:

> Why is everyone talking about culture? ...Let us be clear first of all that there is nothing inherently radical about seeing things as culturally constructed
> (Eagleton, 1997: 1).

If ACE teachers still believe that it is part of our job to politicise the curriculum, we have to reflect carefully on syllabus as well as process. One way of keeping a cutting edge is through encouraging students to reflect on the approaches to knowledge and learning inscribed in their courses. What students must be allowed to see – and what we must try to see for ourselves – are the influences on the cultural construction of the curriculum. We should provide opportunities for the programme itself to be opened up to analysis and intellectual challenge by teachers and

learners. Perhaps we might do worse in Cornwall than give every student and tutor a copy of this paper for debate.

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Widening Access: a curriculum for distance learning

Caroline Whiting

This paper outlines the process of setting up distance learning provision in adult continuing education at Exeter. It, and the project it describes, result directly from funding changes (HEFCE 1994) which have led to an almost total focus on credit bearing courses right across the Adult and Continuing Education sector. Different university departments have adopted a variety of strategies to incorporate their long and dearly held vision of liberal adult education into an external initiative apparently based on economic, rather than educational grounds (Richardson 1997). For the Department of Continuing and Adult Education (DCAE) at Exeter, the changes have resulted in a reduction in both numbers of courses and venues for delivery. It is this, maybe rather than the accreditation itself, that has had the effect of excluding many potential students: there simply are not the courses at the time and place that can be taken advantage of. Mobility for non car owners in a sparsely populated area is worse than ever with public transport provision being particularly bad in the evenings.

Geography seemed to be the major problem. There was clearly a need to overcome the distance between students and university so funding was sought and obtained to develop distance learning provision, using Information and Communications Technology as a contributing element. The aim was to achieve three central outcomes:

1. Find ways to offer provision to rural students who cannot get to normal sessions

2. Avoid significant extra cost to the participating student

3. Build the distance learning provision into the existing departmental framework of mainstreamed courses to ensure life for the initiative after the project ends.

It was clear that the first task was to clarify the issues that should be addressed in developing a distance learning programme in the rural area we hoped to cover. The word 'distance' seemed crucial - it seemed to be the biggest barrier, yet the one which it might be most practical to break down. Decisions had already been made to include IT in the plans; but alongside that was a commitment to quality teaching and learning and a clear aim to avoid letting the medium be the driving force. With these thoughts in mind it seemed necessary to ask at least these questions:

- What models of teaching and learning are appropriate to distance courses?

- What are appropriate technologies and how can students access them?

- What are the staff involvement and development issues in the provision of computer based or supported distance courses?

- How can we gather and balance the necessary breadth of expertise, involving academics, library and IT staff, to provide high quality courses?

- Do we need to facilitate a culture change in embarking on a necessarily collaborative venture?

- Can we balance the need of distance students for adequate support with the need for departments to make courses viable?

- How can we incorporate this initiative into existing departmental provision and future plans?

Attempting to address these questions, the following working model (figure 1) incorporates five directions for enquiry and action; central are the three areas where decisions have to be made in order to move forward with the new distance learning curriculum; this curriculum would ultimately have to be described in terms of structure, content and delivery. Each of these was interdependent on the other, and all three very much dependent on departmental developments at the time.

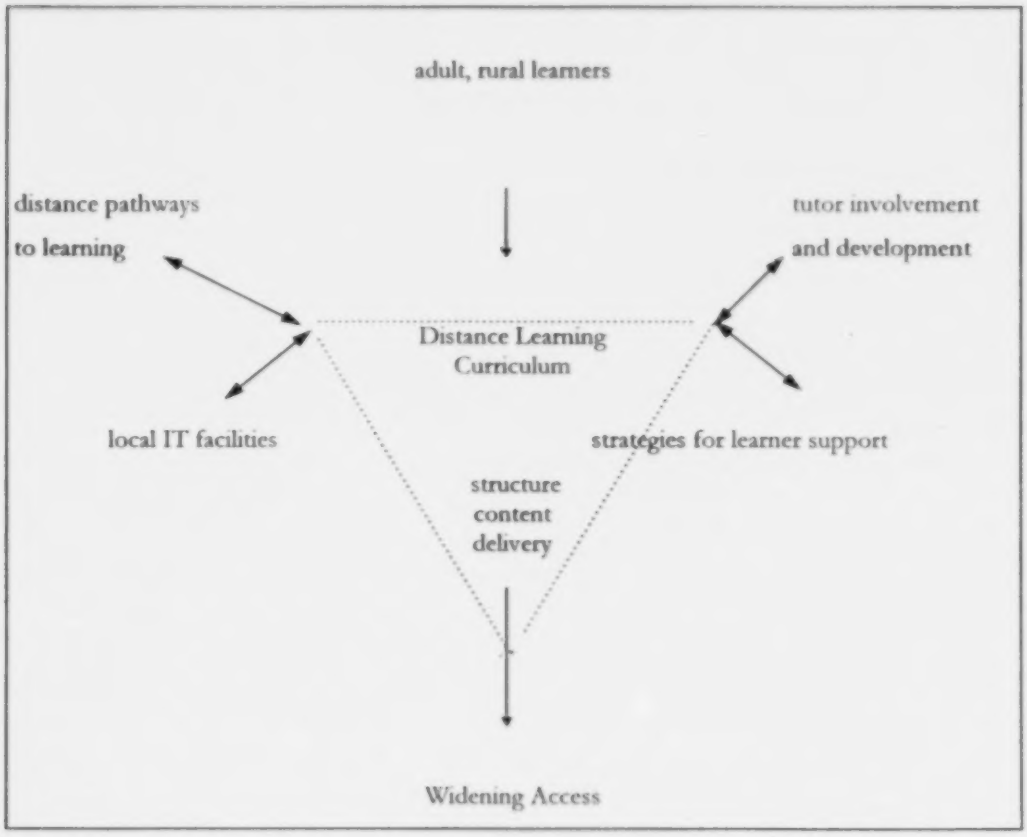

Figure 1

Structure

It was considered essential that any distance learning developments should fit in with overall institutional Continuing Education plans rather than be separated from them. It was felt, therefore, that project resources would be best used to improve staff knowledge and expertise in distance delivery; this would represent an investment that could later be applied to course development work which was going on in the normal way. With this in mind, it was decided that distance students would be offered a number of accredited courses, underpinned by a series of independent study tutorials and non accredited short courses to support them in their study.

Delivery

Both format of learning materials and student support had to be considered. Decisions about technology needed to be made in the first year. A number of reasons convinced us to adopt a fairly 'low tech' approach, at least in terms of pilot courses. Thus it was hoped to avoid some of the problems (for example: cost, incompatibility, inaccessibility, a requirement for specialist equipment, prior skills or knowledge or a need for a massive investment in tutor development) associated with alternative solutions. Our aim was to offer distance students real opportunities to study their chosen subjects - to offer high quality learning experiences. We did not wish to be led or bogged down by the technology. Additionally, we wanted decisions at this stage to keep avenues open so that as our expertise broadened, new or more demanding technologies could be incorporated, if appropriate, at a later date.

Format

It was decided, then, that materials should be in text, or for those tutors who wished to pursue this route, hypertext; and that they should be delivered on disk or hard copy, by post, by Email attachments or at day schools. Resources would either be provided (as photocopies or video for example), or clearly signposted (Internet links, texts to buy or borrow). It was in the area of student support and resourcing that the opportunities of technological advance seemed most useful. A pair of disk based tutorials prepare and practise students in electronic resourcing; and Email was to be the most common pathway for contact between student and tutor, and student and student, building on relationships begun at day schools which were to be a structural element of courses. This asynchronous communications technology could be accessed by anyone with a modem connection, and by those with less than up to date machines or operating systems. No specific software was demanded - any Email programme could be used. Issues of incompatibility can usually be solved, and the increasing use of Microsoft 'Word' as the standard word processor (by individuals using Apple Macintosh computers , as well as PCs) would perhaps further reduce problems of this kind in the future. By forming mailing lists of student groups, not only would the sending of materials and instructions be facilitated, but tasks and discussion topics could be set, questions asked and answered; contact could be maintained - all of this making no demand on either tutor or students to initiate, view or respond at any particular time. In addition to the course list, students can meet through a wider distance learning list which would include all the University distance students and tutors. To parallel these, students can also communicate with student only groups.[1] These decisions also left open the option to consider, at a later stage, the added value that may be afforded by the use of more specialised software or hardware. Computer based courseware and Internet based learning interfaces or conferencing systems are increasingly used for course delivery or support, and correspondingly evaluations in real life settings can better inform choices. More detailed investigation still needs to be carried out into the usefulness of these, and of video conferencing.[2] Because of the possible cost and exclusivity of any of these options, what they offer will have to be shown to be in addition to what is achievable through Email or the World Wide Web.

Content

Accredited courses

As pilots, it was decided to select some accredited courses which were to be presented in the normal way and offer these to a small number of additional students who would study 'at a distance'. Day schools would draw both 'face-to-face' and distance students together at crucial points in the course. This strategy was seen as valuable at a number of levels:

- In terms of tutor workload it meant that tutors would be adding an extra dimension to their normal course development, rather than developing distance courses from scratch.

- Preparing courses in two different modes demanded examination of issues of teaching and learning.

- Costing for viability seemed feasible by including day schools for all students and defining extra tutor time for distance students into the course structure.[3]

- Evaluation from pilots could be fed in directly to future departmental planning.

The content of accredited courses, then, was not to be separate from 'normal' provision. Courses for distance delivery would be chosen from those which were already being offered, or in development. This seemed appropriate not just for reasons of viability, but also to offer distance students as far as possible, similar choices to their face-to-face peers. Employing a cascading strategy, the first pilots would be developed exclusively by core tutors in the department. At a second stage in the project, part time tutors would also be invited to contribute and the department would be in a position to offer practical support and experience to facilitate this.

Non accredited short support modules

The overwhelming message from those engaged in distance education is that, to keep students engaged, and thus to minimise dropout, they need support. Therefore, support models have been developed. The intention is that these will act as underpinnings for accredited courses that students may wish to study; part of their purpose being to familiarise students with study methods that they will later need to employ. We aimed to provide support for students at whichever level they required it, offering a package of provision from which they could pick and choose according to need. Two levels of provision are reflected in the two formats for delivery:

1. Generic study skills and computer use. [4]

These aim to develop skills in using the computer, as a stand alone or network machine, specifically for study purposes. As well as offering opportunities to develop practical skills in using computers for storing, analysing, managing and presenting work, the value of tapping into its power as a pathway to support and resources for learning through access to the Internet can be explored. These take the form of self study tutorials which can be taken at any time and at a student's own pace. At the most basic level, students may have no familiarity with computers at all, so the keyboard and mouse tutorial, for instance, must be introduced on paper, giving clear written instructions on how to proceed. Examples on which to work can be included on a disk. As students progress, or come in at a higher level, materials will be available on disk. Support or advice may be sought from the project officer or the computing officer, or in respect of the courses incorporating Internet use, from fellow students through a mailing list.[5]

2. Discipline specific introductory courses

These consist of a series of 'introduction to the disciplines' (covering the range of proposed distance provision of accredited courses) plus an introduction to higher level study skills and research designed to help students carry out independent study and research in the disciplines offered as accredited courses. These courses need the support of a tutor as well as the project officer and computing officer, so it was decided that they should be offered as 5 or 10 week courses at least once a year. Materials will be presented as accredited courses: on paper or on disk or as Email attachments. Support will similarly be through Email, post or telephone.

Collaboration

One of the most important features of this curriculum development was the need for collaboration. It is not within the scope of this paper to detail this issue, but it is of such importance that it cannot go without mention and I would like to highlight two connected areas.

Expertise

Distance learning, especially distance learning using information and communications technology, demands expertise of a level and scope which is unlikely to be found ready and waiting within small departments like DCAE. Decisions have to be made about how to locate suitable expertise, and the levels to which tutors need to raise their own skills and knowledge. A project officer and a part time computing officer are a good start - they should be valuable in identifying needs and indeed, satisfying some of them but it will always be necessary to locate more expert sources of information and support. It is likely that this expertise will cost money and demand working relationships with people from outside the department. Further to this, academic staff who develop courses need to become constituent parts of this collaborative project - this usually results in extra time and effort, on top of their usual commitments, and also means looking at their teaching and learning strategies with a critical and reflective eye and being prepared to share this process with others. This leads on to the following point:

Tutor development and support

This is a crucial issue. It is not just the students who need to develop their IT study skills. For tutors, a whole new range of knowledge has to be incorporated into their course planning covering aspects of distance learning and support, resourcing and IT. A number of strategies were applied in this case. The project enabled the purchase of a new computer running Windows '95 for each member of core staff. Introductory sessions by library and computer staff as well as the project officer were organised. Individuals spent time with the project officer discussing their needs and tutors were able to take internal IT courses provided by IT services. The self study tutorials will also be available to staff as well as students; these may be particularly useful as part time tutors are drawn into the project activities, but also to those core staff who are working on materials for the second stage. An internal mailing list was set up for tutors, and the department as a whole now endeavours to use Email for intradepartmental communication. One of the project directors ran lunch time sessions on aspects of computer use for those who were interested. Skills are best developed through use, and it is at the point of course development when the specific needs of individual courses and tutors becomes clear.

There were a number of reasons why progress in course development may have been slower than envisaged, and where our cascading strategy was shown to have weaknesses. Explanations include

- The department and the university as a whole was going through a period of change and upheaval
- Tutors were volunteered rather than volunteers.
- There was no additional time or money for tutors
- Patterns of study leave and other commitments made continuity difficult
- There was no compulsion for delivery by a particular time.

Deeper issues

There is a clear effect of acting in the ways we did. It is *comparatively* easy to sort out practical questions. It is possible to get some sort of answers to those questions quickly enough to set the project into action. Certainly the issue of rurality in terms of geography would fall into that category: practical decisions about structure of provision, choices of technology, access points for that technology, content and format of distance learning packages and so on, even the building up of staff IT expertise. One bonus afforded us during the planning of the project was the development of a network of telematics centres throughout the area, funded from Europe. Computer and Internet access through these centres, at least for the first year or two, is going to be very cheap indeed (an additional £15 on a £42 two term course). This means the exclusivity of the computer based learning opportunities we are offering is somewhat reduced. But other, deeper, or more theoretical questions are much harder to resolve, so they tend to get put to one side.

There is a strong tendency for funded projects of this kind to be action based, aiming at producing outcomes in practical and measurable form. Those in receipt of money usually are required to show evidence of those outcomes. Indeed, the aim of those who bid for financial support is to affect participation, not to describe it. Those writing about such projects concerned in particular with rural participation in HE (e.g. Gorard et al 1997, Lowerson 1995) indicate that there is plenty said, and done, about practical needs specifically relating to rural areas, but many hint in their reports at an awareness that the most powerful barriers to participation are not those of practical accessibility but those of an idiosyncratic social and psychological grounding, maybe, but not necessarily, specifically related to rurality. As Lowerson (p3) points out:

> One major issue for investigation would be a survey of actual and potential students as well as of non -participants in rural areas. It would be particularly important to establish the relationship between economics and social factors in inhibiting responsiveness when linked with cultural ones and the problems of a 'rural mindset'

Ignoring these concerns may result in improvements in the quality and range of provision, and take up may be good, but those very people who we may describe as disadvantaged educationally could be those who once more fail to be reached. It may be the case, that as this work progresses, we find the old barriers reinforced by the distance provision. Technology carries with it not just financial, but sociological and psychological implications. However, patterns of teaching and learning which become associated with distance courses **could** help to weaken rather than bolster these. This is an area which could bear scrutiny over the ensuing project development and certainly evaluation would be enriched by its inclusion as an issue.

Furthermore, the agendas applied by project funding are not the only influence on the way the work must go. Working within particular institutional contexts also limits the options of those working on new initiatives. In Exeter's case, it meant introducing such a development into a department already working hard, in a time of change and uncertainty, to provide for students over a wide geographical area, in a range of disciplines and at several levels. It could be pragmatically argued that as an overriding concern we should confine our greatest efforts to those barriers we can see clearly and have the tools to break down. It is there that we can be sure we have the potential to make a difference. I would contend, however, that to assess the success of such work in quantitative terms alone could give a misleading picture of our activities as a suitable pathway for those we most wish to follow it.

Notes

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[1] Because of the distinctive nature of postgraduate modules, tutors opted to use telephone conferencing where they were to be offered at a distance.

[2] Examples of Internet based systems which could be considered include: FirstClass, extensively used by the Open University, TopClass (in use by Dublin University) and Lotus Notes or the new LearningSpace (Greenwich University) The Knowledge Tree has been developed and used by Nottingham University. Additionally computer based learning or assessment materials can be presented through packages such as Multimedia ToolBook, QuestionMark and Microcosm. These too are increasingly designed specifically to be delivered through the Internet or to incorporate and/or record Internet activity between participants. Video conferencing solutions include Sharevision and Picturetel.

[3] An initial costing, when delivery and support formats were decided, suggested an optimal number of five distance students studying alongside the attendance group of an accredited course to be viable.

[4] In the first instance this content was to be based on PC format - variations being produced for Windows 3.1 and '95 where necessary. If there was a demand from Apple Macintosh users, it would certainly be within the scope of the project to prepare alternative materials in this format.

[5] Students on accredited courses, or those on introductory courses as a preliminary to accredited courses may use the University as a free Internet service provider through a dial up facility.

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